DIVINE JUSTICE

or

The Problem of Evil

By

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IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE MOST COMPASSIONATE,
THE MERCIFUL.

Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all beings;
the Most Compassionate, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we pray for succour;
Guide us in the straight path;
the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,
who are immune from Thy wrath
and have never gone astray.

O'Allah! send your blessings to the head of
your messengers and the last of
your prophets, Muhammad
and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send your blessings to all your
prophets and envoys.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
الحمد لله رب العالمين الرحمن الرحيم
مالك يوم الدين إياك نعبد وإياك نستعين
اهدنا الصراط المستقيم صراط الذين
أنعمت عليهم غير المغضوب عليهم
ولا الضالين

اللهم صل على
سيد رسلك وخاتم أنبيائك
محمد وآله الطيبين الطاهرين
وصل على جميع الأنبياء والمرسلين

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Publication Secretary,

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FOREWORD

Throughout the history of thought and action, the justice of God has been a problem which has occupied the mind of nearly every philosopher. The most important reason for this attention is that they have been aware of' deprivation, poverty, exploitation and tyrann, amongst human societies. Being aware of these bitter facts, some have, been led to doubt the justice of God, or even doubt the existence of God. Others have tried to somehow justify this seeming contradiction between God being just and the above mentioned miseries.

This article is a small attempt to prove two points:-

FOREWARD

l. God's justice is a reality.

2. If God is just, it does not mean that individuals have to accept their present social situations; but on the contrary, it will mean that they have to change it.

In the end, I have to thank Mohammed Taghi Jaafari and Morteza Motahhari, Persian philosophers, for lending me their knowledge, and thank Myles Burnyeat, S.M.Noori and S. A. Musawi for encouraging me to write this article.

The author.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

If there is a Just God why, is there so much evil. There is death, war, earthquake, hunger, bitter conditions of life .... etc. The argument then follows that either there is no God or there is a cruel God, who like a monster enjoys seeing us suffer.

This question has been answered in many ways in different ages. Some of them are as follows and we shall have a brief look at them:

l. God is the Perfect Being, and justice is part of perfection. Therefore, God is Just. So whatever of injustice we see in the world, will be rectified eventually. In other words, Ile has no needs, and injustice is either from ignorance

and fanaticism or from need, and none of these are conceivable for the Perfect Being. Imam Husayn, in the deserts of `Arafat, before being martyred by the enemy, said:

"God, you are so needless that you yourself cannot benefit yourself. How hen, can we give anything to you?!"

2. **Evil is necessary for the greatest good.**[1]

3. **Man's freedom**[2] **is the cause of evil.**

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1. Muhammad Taqi Ja'fari, the living Persian philosopher, thinks that this view was first proposed by `Umar Khayyam in his *al-Kawn wa't-taklif* (Existence and Responsibility). In page 390 he says: "Refraining from thousand goods for the sake of one evil, is itself a great evil" i.e. evil is necessary for greater goods.

2. Freedom not in the political sense, but being able to do good or bad. It is only man who has this possibility. He can be kind or he can be cruel. He can be a humanist or he can be an oppresive tyrant

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This view can explain wars and social injustices, but cannot explain earthquakes, death, illness, etc. ....

4. **Evil is a negative thing.**

SUFFERING AND NOT EVIL

Now, let us go a bit deeper in the problem. What we should say at this point is that we

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and killer. "Leibniz," the seventeenth century philosopher, is one of those who believes that man's freedom is the cause of evil. He wrote: "Free will is a great good, but it was logically impossible for God to bestow free will and at the same time decree that there should be no sin. God therefore decided to make man free, although he foresaw that Adam, would eat the apple, and although sin inevitably brought punishment." (Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy,* London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1974, page 570).

commit a mistake by using the term "evil.'. We should rather use: `suffering or hardship.' By doing this we have not done anything against reality or any logical necessity. In the term `evil' there is a concept of injustice hidden. We shall avoid using it, because it is a loaded word.

LIMITLESS DESIRES

Now, by looking at concrete experiences and the nature of things, and also looking at our internal and external factors of life, we see that they are not set in a manner to always coincide with our desires and wishes. The limitlessness of our desires from the one hand, and the mathematical nature of the universe on the other, is the cuase of our illigitimate annoyance. For example, we want to be absolute knowers;

we want to possess absolute ownership of the world without being disturbed. We do not want to get sick. On the other hand, neither does our existential factors give value to these desires, nor do the natural elements abide to these wishes. And since our internal nature and the world itself do not permit our limitless desires, we raise our hands to the sky and say: "O God'. what an evilful universe."

But, somebody who knows that the paraffin in his lamp is limited, will not moan after its extinction. One who knows that this lamp which he has lit is not safe from winds, will not scream when the wind blows it out. The system of the natural world is the same, and one who lives in it cannot come out of the currents of that system. So, we are obliged to accept that there is suffering. *The question to ask is that, is it logical to say that these sufferings are against justice? (You* should note

that we are not talking about sufferings caused by humans: wars, torture, poverty......). The answer to the question is negative, since we have to understand the various meanings of justice. There is **sentimental justice,** like a mother offering all her love for her child. There is *legal justice.* There is also *moral* and **philosophical justice.** I will try to define the last two:

Philosophical Justice: Every subject and phenomenon should travel in its appropriate line and current towards its perfection.

Moral Justice: Do not inflict any suffering on anything else.

Philosophical justice means that *even if the sick screams and moans, give him the bitter medicine that he needs and do the surgery which is for his good.*

SPECTATORS AND PARTICIPENTS

Those who have been in contact with man and nature from close-up and have not been mere spectators, have never doubted the justice of God. Socrates, in the time of his prosecution, takes the cup of poison from the guard and drinks it. Since he had a great message for all men of all times, he drank the poison with no fear.

If we look at the life of `Ali ibn Abi Talib, Prophet Muhammad's miracle [1] and most beloved companion, we find it filled with suffering and pain. One out of many, is that he was the best in knowledge and action among his society,

1. According to Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Persian philosopher, physician and scientist of the Middle Ages, "Prophet Muhammad had two miracles: The Qur'an and `Ali," because `Ali was educated wholly by the Prophet.

yet he remained silent for twenty nine years for the sake of the people's ideological unity at that time. Although he had the power to revolt and seize power, he did not and saw others rule. He accepted this psychological suffering for twenty-nine years. Later, when the people realized who he was and came to him and chose him as their leader, he ruled the society with utmost justice. A kind of justice which has made , an eastern materialist Shibli Shumayyil say about him: "The leader `Ali ibn Abi Talib, greatest of all, is the man who neither the West nor Fast, neither yesterday nor today, have seen his example."[1] `Ali himself has said: "If you give me all the world with everything in it, in condition that I take a husk of barley from an ant's mouth, I will not do so! "[2]

1. George Jordagh, Imam Ali, *The voice of Human Justice.*
2. `Ali ibn Abi Talib, *Nahj al-balaghah.*

For the just,[1] this world is most painful, but nevertheless, `Ali never said that this world is evil. fie always said that it is the world of suffering, be ready, be careful. He also said: "This world is the best place for one who understands it well."

You might say that very well, but it does not follow that since some men like `Ali or Socrates have said and done so the problem of evil does not exist. Very well, but where did the problem of evil come from anyway? From the minds of some other people whose lives were quite more comfortable than Socrates' or `Ali's? Like Epicurus, Hume or Mill or even me and you.

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1 . In fact when we believe in the justice of God, we will try to see the same justice in society. Because any injustice will be against the will of God and against the music of the universe. And this is why the belief in the justice of God was always a threat to the ruling powers.

Looking at their biographies, none have suffered as much as the first group. The latter in comparison with the former, are really spectators of life rather than participents. So you can see how subjective and relative the problem of evil (suffering) is.

QUESTION: Now that we know that suffering and hardship could be used for the benefit of the individual, let us see what the benefits are in more detail. But, at this very point you might ask: *Even if I agree that there is goodness and 'purpose in suffering, why couldn't God create the same result without suffering?* If He is Omnipotent and Wise, why did He prescribe for us to go through all this difficulty and hardship to reach a developed stage?

We can answer this question in many ways, but there is a very basic answer which cuts the root of the problem from the very bottom and shows how narrow and unwarranted our

questions are.

ANSWER: "Justice means to have a method and current according to a law (or a set of laws). So, unless there is a law outside a being who has to conform to that law, we cannot conceive justice. A person is just when his method and practice is according to a law (or a set of laws) which its reality is outside the belonging of that person and is not changable by that person. For example, in society there is a law that workers should be paid. This law is a reality outside the choice of the individuals. In other words, they cannot change this law individually. If somebody pays the worker he has observed justice and if' lie does not, he has not observed justice.

"This principle about justice, does not apply to God at all, since there is no law which can be outside the realm of God's power or choice and no law can restrict Him. Therefore, we say that God's actions are according to Divine *`hikmah'*

or purpose, and not according to laws which we create through our knowledge and desires, and falsely compare them with His justice.

"In other words, the clay in the hands of the potter cannot make laws for the potter, and cannot compare the potter's justice with those laws."[1]

This was the first answer which makes the question vanish completely. There is also another answer to the question. But before we go to that, let us repeat the question once again: "Why do we have to go through all these difficulties, created by God, in order to reach a developed stage?" We need to study the orders of existence to understand the second answer:

1. Muhammad Taqi Ja'fari in an interview.

ORDERS OF EXISTENCE

There are two orders in the beings of the world. We can cal! them the longitudinal order and the transversal order. The longitudinal order is the place of things in the cause and effect chain of creation. In the language of religion, Angels, The Book (of Allah), The Distributors, The Pen and so on, all show of a certain order and arrangement in existence. This order is not formal but necessary. In this order, the flame of a matchstick cannot compete with the Sun, and the change of a possible thing into something necessary is not imaginable. A cause cannot change its place with its own effect (at the same time and place). All the mistakes which we make that why `this' couldn't have been in the place of `that' or why an imperfect being can't change its place with a perfect being,is because we have not understood the necessary and essential rela-

tions of things. We compare the existential order with conventional orders and social stratifications. We think that when we can change a manager with his worker, or a landlord with a peasant, then why couldn't have a sheep been a human being. When the exploited workers and proletariat can overthrow and replace the rich exploiters, with belief and class struggle, why couldn't have God made a lame person a perfect athlete. This is impossible, because the cause being the cause and the effect being the effect is not conventional or formal. If `A' is the cause of 'B' it is because there is something in the nature of `A' that has made it the cause. Also, the specification of 'B' has made it relate to `A' and this specification is nothing but those attributes which have made 'B' exist. Once you take the specifications away from `B,' you are left with something else and not 'B.' These specifications are real and not conventional or trans-

ferable. Take the number `5.' It comes after `4' and before `6.' You cannot put `5' anywhere else without loosing its identity. If you put it, say, before `4' it will be `3,' even if you call it `5 ' You cannot change the reality of `3,' although you change its name. [1]

Between all creatures of the universe exists such a deep and existential order. If you take anything out of its existential place, it will loose its substance and will not be the same thing anymore. If you give a triangle four sides instead of three, it is not a triangle anymore; in fact it is a square. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) has a nice sentence here. He said: "God did not make apricots into apricots, but He created apricots." What it means is that there was no stage when all the fruits were equal and then God discriminated between them. Each fruit is unique. This uniqueness, applies to

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1. Extracted from `*Adl-i ilahi* by Murtada Mutahhari

different beings and personalities as well. The holy Qur'an says:

... رَبُّنَا الَّذِى أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَىْءٍ خَلْقَهُ
ثُمَّ هَدَى (طه: ٥٠)

"......Our Lord is He who gave unto everything its nature, then guided it aright " (20:50).

In another place it says:

إِنَّمَا قَوْلُنَا لِشَىْءٍ إِذَا أَرَدْنَاهُ أَنْ نَقُولَ لَهُ
كُنْ فَيَكُونُ (النحل: ٤٠)

"Our word for a thing, when We intend it, is only that We say to it: Be! and it is "[1] (16:40).

1. This is not contradictory to evolutionary theories, given that they are valid, since the question still remains that why one evolved into that thing and the other into another thing.

Now, let us go on to the **transversal order:**

The transversal order determines the temporal and material conditions of phenomenons. And it is with this order that history takes a definite and certain form. Qur'an refers to this order of existence in this way:

. . . ولن تجد لسنة الله تبديلا

(الاحزاب: ٦٢)

" ...., and you shall not find any change in the course of Allah " (Qur'an, 33:62) .

Some of these deterministic laws are mentioned in the Qur'an, like this law:

. . . إن الله لا يغير ما بقوم حتى يغيروا ما بأنفسهم .

(الرعد: ١١)

"Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their selves?" (13:11)

A wonderful sentence from a wonderful Book.

Now, to sum up this section:

1. The universe has orders and necessary laws, and every phenomenon is writhin that system. Our freedom is also in harmony with that system.

2. For the universe to have an order, there should be differences and stages in existence; and this is the cause of imperfections.

3. Differences are not created. It is a necessary attribute of creatures, and God has made no discrimination between creatures.

4. What is against justice is discrimination and not difference, and in the universe there is difference and not discrimination.

Now that we have understood this section, let us go back to the benefits of suffering for the individual.

BENEFITS OF SUFFERING

It is only through suffering and difficulties that one can attain true happiness and prosperity. The Qur'an says:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا إِنَّ مَعَ
الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانْصَبْ
وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ (الانشراح: ٥، ٦، ٧، ٨)

"......But Lo, with hardship goes ease; Lo, with hardship goes ease; so when you are relieved, still toil, And strive to please your Lord " (94:5-8).

Hegel says: "Disputes and evil (*`suffering,'*

to be precise) are not imaginary; they are quite real and with open eyes they are steps for evolution and goodness. Struggle is the law of progress. Human attributes are evolved and made in the battlefield and riot of the world, and one can reach high perfection only through hardship, responsibility and distress. *Life is not for satisfaction, but for evolution.*

`Ali ibn Abi Talib said in one of his famous letters to `Uthman ibn Hanif, his governor in Basra, that living in comfort and delicateness and avoidance of difficulties ends in weakness and debility, and on the contrary, living in rough conditions makes a mall powerful and agile and transfers Ills existential essence towards refinement. He also reproaches him, in the letter, for having had a dinner with the rich who had allowed no poor for the evening. Ile then gives the example of trees in forests and gardens. Although constant care is taken of garden trees,

yet the deprived tree of the forest has a better quality.

This is why when God is kind to somebody he inflicts him or her with difficulty and suffering. (Exactly the opposite of what most people think) Imam Muhammad Baqir[1] said: "Allah (God) helps his believer and sends him hardships like presents which a man sends for his family."[2] Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq[3] said: "When Allah loves His slave He drowns him in the sea of suffering."[4]

Like a swimming tutor who throws his new student into the water and makes him struggle and learn swimming, Allah does the same to perfect his beloved slaves.

I. The 5th Imam after the Holy Prophet.
2. Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar,* New Edition: vol.67, p.213.
3. The 6th Imam, or carrier of wisdom after the Holy Prophet.
4. Majlisi, *Biharal-anwar,* vo1.67, p.208.

If one reads a whole lifetime about swimming, one will not learn how to swim. We have to go into the water and struggle with the danger of drowning, and then we will learn swimming. "The most difficult lives are possessed first by the prophets, then those who come after them in virtue." [1] Sa'di of Shiraz says: [2] "Sa'di has spent all his life with bitterness that now you hear his name with sweetness."

The educational aspect of suffering can be seen in Rumi,[3] the great Sufi philosopher and poet of 13th Century, where he makes the point clear with this analogy: "They threw a grain on the earth; then came out branches. Next they crushed it in the mill; it became more expensive

1. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq narrated from The Prophet Muhammad. *(Bihar al-anwar, vo1.67, p.200.*
2. Great Persian poet of 13th Century.
3. His full name is: Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi Mawlawi.

and useful in bread form. Next the bread was grounded under the teeth and after digestion became mind, spirit and useful thought. Again when the mind was bewildered with love, what a surprise this cultivation had been!"[1]

Another universal point which we should mention here is that *opposites produce opposites*. Existence and non-existance, life and death, permanence and non-permanence, youth and oldness are linked with each other. This dialectic is the natural law of this world. Sa'di said: "Treasure and snake and flower and thorn and sorrow and happiness come together."[2] Rumi can clarify the point again where he says: "Hardship can bring the treasure, and happiness lies in hardship. The core becomes fresh and pure when the skin is scratched away. Oh brother!

1. Mathnawi, Book 1.
2. Collected works.

dark and cold places, struggling with sorrow and fighting against laziness and pain, is the fountain of life and intoxication; since all this greatness lies in lowness."[1] So, if we want to attain true happiness, we have to go through all the difficult stages. Great men, in fact, suffered from torture, poverty, imprisonment, deprivation and even death, and this is why they became great. We will end this section with a sentence by Mulla Sadra:[2] "If there was no opposition (contradiction) in existence, the continuance of benefit from the Merciful God would not have been possible."[3]

1. Mathnawi, Book 2.
2, 18th Century Persian philosopher.
3. *Asfar,* vo1.3

THE PROBLEM OF DEATH

Another important subject which creeps in when we think of our existence and God's justice is death.

If God is just how can death destruct our evolved and purified selves after the long and laborious school of our lives?

The answer is that it does not. The reasons are quite a few. First of all, God has told us through all of his prophets, that death is not the end of the story of our lives. Since I have assumed that you believe in God, this evidence is quite substantial. (You are aware that the problem of evil or suffering arises after assuming or knowing the existence of God)

There are many ways which we can prove our life after death. Apart from experiential proofs such as telepathy, prescience, dreams and contact with the dead, there are many

rational ones; such as this one which argues on the basis of desires and satisfactions.

For every desire in us there is something in the world which will satisfy it. Our thirst can be satisfied with water. Our hunger with food. Our love with the beloved. Sexual desire is fulfilled by the opposite sex. Our desire for knowledge is satisfied with knowledge. So, *every desire and ability is a proof that there is a perfection which our desires are aimed towards that perfection.* Now, we have this very powerful desire in us, namely the desire to be eternal. By a little introspection we can see that all of us have this desire to be conscious for ever of what is happening in the universe. Now, what state or thing can satisfy this desire? Nothing of the material or psychological things we see around us. Isn't this the proof that there is a life after death where our desire for eternity will be satisfied? Rumi clarifies this with a nice analogy:

"It is an elephant that dreams of India when it sleeps. No donkey dreams of India, since the donkey has never missed India.' [1] We, in fact, are like that elephant, and eternity is like India. The elephant belongs to India and that is why he dreams about it. Similarly, eternity is where we belong to, since we dream about it.

'these hopes and spiritual desires are what has been called by gnostics the 'non-homogeneity' and `homesickness' of man in this earthy life.

Somebody asked Aristotle that if life was better or death. He replied: "In my eyes they are the same." The man asked again: "Do you like to die now?" Aristotle replied: "I said they are the same, I did not say death was better. Since it is a light which you take from this house to the other."

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1. Mathnawi, Book 4.

Our condition after death is nothing, but our actions in objective and concrete form. To be more clear, we 'see' our actions. Rumi can help us again: "Death of every person, my friend, is like himself. For a friend it is a friend and for an enemy an enemy. O' you who are afraid of death, while running away, be aware that you yourself are the cause of this fear. It is your own ugly face, not death's. Your soul is like a tree and death its leaves. If you are tired of thorns, you have cultivated them; and if you are in fine silk you yourself' have spun." [1]

قُلْ إِنَّ الْمَوْتَ الَّذِي تَفِرُّونَ مِنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ
مُلَاقِيكُمْ ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ
فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ . (الجمعة : ٨)

1. Mathnawi, Book 3.

"The death from which you shrink will surely meet you, and afterward you will be returned unto- the Knower of the invisible and the visible, and He will tell you what you used to do " (Qur'an, 62:8).

"O' Allah, set our deaths into being killed in your way." [1]

THE END

1. A prayer by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, from the Prophet.